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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KIRF](#) [KDEM](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: MINISTER OF PARLIAMENTARY AND JUDICIAL AFFAIRS ON
THE LEGISLATIVE AGENDA

Classified By: Ambassador Margaret Scobey, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) In a cordial December 23 meeting, Minister of State for Parliamentary and Judicial Affairs Mufeed Shehab previewed Egypt's 2008-2009 legislative agenda for the Ambassador. Shehab confirmed that the Political Rights Law will be amended to add 56 new seats (2 per province) in the People's Assembly designated specifically for women, resulting in the legislature growing to a total of 510 members. He also said that Egypt's family laws will be updated, "to provide women with increased rights following a divorce, and with regard to custody of the children." Shehab anticipated that the Professional Syndicates law will be amended to "ease" the regulations regarding syndicate elections - "I do not anticipate this will be controversial, and it will allow the syndicates, many of which have not had elections since 1993, to vote for new leaders." (Note: In an effort to combat increasing Muslim Brotherhood victories in syndicate elections, the government passed a law in 1993 requiring that, in order for an election to be held, at least fifty-percent of the syndicate's members be present. For organizations such as the Engineers Syndicate, or the Pharmacists Syndicate, which have tens of thousands of members, achieving such a quorum was impossible. The new law will require that thirty-percent of a syndicate's membership be present in order to hold an election, and if that quorum cannot be achieved, then a subsequent election can be held, at which only twenty-percent of the syndicate's members need to be present. End note). Shehab also predicted that new laws regulating organ transplants, and health insurance will be passed.

¶2. (C) Responding to the Ambassador's inquiry about the possibility of parliament debating a draft Unified Law on Construction of Places of Worship (which would create equal procedures for the building of mosques and churches), Shehab said that the issue is "easy in theory, but in actuality, is extremely complex." He mused that a draft law proposed by the National Council on Human Rights would change the way mosque building is currently administered. "Currently, the Minister of Awqaf has to approve the construction of mosques, and he often refuses the building of new ones, which subjects him to quite a bit of criticism. Liberalizing the law would mean the proliferation of more mosques - something Egypt does not need. Building decisions would end up in the courts, and then you'd have protests against judicial decisions that barred mosques, but allowed churches, for instance. You must be sensitive to Egyptian realities. President Mubarak is afraid to have new legislation on this topic - it is simply too incendiary." The Ambassador commented that, as an advocate for religious freedom, the USG hopes for a means by which all communities can have a predictable way to construct houses of worship. Shehab replied that the key is to focus Egyptians on their common identity through citizenship, not through religion.

SCOBEY